

Culture queries

1. Traditionally smearing with candana is done with a flower or leaf or what?

In Madhvas it is smeared using fingers not flower or leaf (Pejavar Math, Uttaradi Math, Puttige Math).

The pusti-marga farmer devotees I met told that they smear candana using fingers and not flowers or leaf. Also a pusti-marga scholar told the same thing.

2. Head uncovered during arcana?

In pusti-marga, they cover head during arcana but this is not the rule followed because of being given in smrtis or arcana paddhati. They say that they are to worship in mood of yasoda-mayi or elder gopis and thus they are to adopt the culture of those gopis of covering their head while worshipping.

Vasanthacarya (Madhva in Baroda): Yes, head to be kept uncovered during arcana.

3. Is it acceptable to cut and clear thorny and posionous trees without the considerations applied to pious trees?
4. Sikha – what do balding men do?

From Bharatacandra Pr:

“khalvāṭi vā ādi doṣeṇa visikhaḥ ca naro bhavet kauśīmī tadaḥ dhārayīta brahmagranthiyutam shikham” (Samskara-bhaskara).

“atha cetpramāḍānnisikhamī vapanamī syāṭi tadaḥ kauśīmī śikhāmī brahmagranthisamānvitāmī dakṣiṇakarṇoparyā śikhā bandhāddadha tiṣṭhet” (Kāṭakagrhya sutra)

If due to baldness or other factors, one is bereft of Sikha, then few strands of Kusa grass can be placed on the right ear before performing sandhyavandana and other duties.

Vinayaka Udupa (Smarta Scholar at Sringeri) echoed the statement similar to above.

5. There are examples in *sāstra* of men calling their wives by name, for example Lord Śiva addressing his wife as Bhavāni;ⁱ other examples are in the section below from *Uttara-rāma-carita*. However, this usage is now not applicable.

6. What is a definition of kaccha?

Answers from Vinayaka Udupa (Sringeri), Sringeri Veda Pathasala's principal, an elder student at Madhva Gurukula at Mumbai (Satyadhyana Vidyapeetham), from a teacher at Puttige matha's gurukula, from a veda pathasala at Kumbakonam:

Kaccha means to tuck (or fold) the parts of dhoti near waist. Panca-kaccha means one tucks dhoti at five places – 1&2. Two folds tucking (not making a knot) while first wrapping around waist, 3. Tucking one end of dhoti to the back, 4. Tucking another end of dhoti in front, 5. tucking the below end (from 4th tuck) to side of dhoti (in ISKCON some devotees like Savyasachi Prabhu follow this system while some like Gokulacandra Prabhu just have till the 4th tuck leaving the front end hanging in air). Panca-kaccha is recommended for grhasthas.

From a Pusti-marga scholar in Bharuch (he seems to be a good scholar, has minutely observed rituals of many vaisnava sampradayas and has written about 10 books in Gujarati and a few in Hindi. In one book he is detailing 250 types of aratis that are in existence with their procedures and reasons behind them.):--- Panca kaccha is must at least in worshipping. Panca kaccha has a reason – the ends (or corners) of dhoti represents four Vedas in its original form in Goloka. The portions below waist are considered of low quality (as they are also described as sudra). Thus the four corners of dhoti should never be below waist. Thus in panca-kaccha all the corners are tucked in.

7. Is kaccha prescribed in sastra for saris?

Regarding sarees, pusti-marga scholar at Bharuch said that kaccha in sarees is also recommended. In Maharashtra and few other places still women wear sarees with kaccha. In pusti-marga, at least while worshipping women are supposed to wear sarees with kaccha (not very famous instruction today) – they in Gujarati 'kachoTo vArine'. He has an old line drawing of some part of bhagavatam where a woman is shown with a saree worn with kaccha.

8. Why if kaccha is prescribed do even south Indian brahmanas wear vestis?

The strict followers in smarta as well as vaisnavas in South India wear dhotis with panca-kacchas (even Vinayaka Udupa and Principal of Veda Pathasala at Sringeri alongwith other grhasthas at Sringeri wore their dhotis this way).

9. What is trikaccha?

No one of those who met heard of trikaccha. For Sannyasis they say that kaupina is the dress for them. The dhoti they wear is not known as trikaccha.

10. **Do different smritis give different instructions for different activities and if so why?
E.g. to tie or not tie the sikha while evacuating would not seem caste-specific.
Pancaratra Pradipa says to keep sikha tied at most times, evacuating not an exception.
But some smrti says to loosen it while evacuating. Is this a case of conflicting smrtis
and if so how do we resolve conflicting smrtis in the absence of any clear guideline
from our acaryas?

For the overall question of what to do in case of conflicting smrti instructions when we do not have clear guidance from our ācāryas - I would try to reply here.

In short, the answer from Manu Smrti and Medhatithi's commentary [see pages 97 onwards and 122 onwards of the file named "Manu Smrti, Medhatithi, Ganganath Jha - 2.ENG Trans (commentary Included)(TEXT).pdf" that I have given to your holiness] is that in case of conflict between Veda and Smrti, Veda is to be regarded as authority. [Note: in our case Srimad bhagavatam is to be considered final authority due to reasons proved by six gosvamis and mentioned by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura]. So the descending order of authority is Veda, Puranas and Itihasas, Dharma-sastras, tradition.

In case of conflict among sastras of same authority, say two smrtis or two puranas, both are regarded as valid option, any can be followed. This is as per Manu Smrti and Medhatithi explains this in detail.

Now the above considerations are valid provided that we have known what different sources are saying and that the matter is thoroughly discussed by the commentators on it. And then also if the conflict remains unsolved then the above rules are to be applied. So first of all we need to make our information very confirmed and then above discretion should be applied. For this:

First of all I would collect instructions on the same subject (say tightening or loosening sikha) from different smrtis, puranas, itihasas, grhya-sutras, and Vedas. This can be done by utilizing modern scholarly works like PV Kane's History of Dharma-sastras and also works of Raghunandana-acarya, kamalakara, etc. These are people who compiled instructions on particular topics from different sastras and mentioned references also, something similar to what Sanatana Gosvami did in Hari-bhakti-vilasa. Previously although smrtikaras mentioned from main sastras (like puranas) there doesn't seem a custom to mention the reference (probably because there was no need).

Then I will search for the commentaries on the granthas of reference – say for example if it is stated in yajnavalkya smrti that sikha should be tied while evacuating then I will consult Mitaksara and Balambhatti. Many times they discuss conflicting ideas from other smrtis on the matter (specifically medieval commentators like Vijnanesvara and medhatithi). This becomes an important tool to see things in perspective. Best will be if I get commentaries on the conflicting sources – eg. Suppose if Yajnavalkya says sikha should be tied while Manu says it should be loose. Then we have commentaries on both these and I would seek the reference to both.

[Note: Above steps are taken provided that I have already checked that our ācāryas do not provide any concrete information (or have any fixed opinion) on this matter.]

Also I would try to get references from puranas in order of sattva, rajo and tamo-guna divisions and then seek for the commentaries to those puranas and see (Visnu Purana is the most preferred one because it has 2 commentaries from vaisnavas and is the purana highly revered by Sri Vaisnavas and thus protected). Mahabharata and Ramayana are also good sources. Unfortunately Mahabharata has only two running commentaries (not very elaborate). Ramayana does have many commentaries.

Then I will collect data from traditions of different sampradayas (I may stick to the four sampradayas and sankara sampradaya). In collecting that data I would ask what the old brahmanas in these traditions used to follow (due to the statement of manu that the learned man of different varnas are to be taken as authority. See Pg.126 onwards in the same file mentioned above in green).

[Note: Commentary to a few verses from pg.126 onwards is quite informative and logical. Thus it's worth reading. It also comments on the practice of parents eating with the small child not yet initiated. And it also discusses the practice of marrying with maternal uncle's daughter, etc.]

Now I have all the three sources of dharma ready – Sruti (Vedas), Smrti (dharma-sastras), and tradition. Now if there is unsolved conflict (means the commentaries are also not solving the conflict) among two smrtis then I have to see the tradition (provided no clear cut instruction is provided in vedas). If all the traditions are following same instruction then I can solve the conflict by accepting the practice that traditions are following rejecting the other practice. If traditions are also following different practices complying either to one or to the other smrti then I come to conclusion that it is an option and I can select one practice or other to follow.

There can be a case where all the sampradayas are found to have some common practice not mentioned in Veda, smrti or puranas. What to do in such case? Medhatithi explains that as it is known that a lot of part of the Vedas is lost, it may be taken that the practice is bonafide and that the part of Vedas containing it is lost. For instance noon sandhyavandanam (madhyahnikam) is rarely mentioned in scriptures but this practice is very much stressed in all the sampradayas from time immemorial.

Also this is just a general guideline given, and every issue may be unique and the evidences available need to be judged case to case based on these guidelines.

Now in my opinion, for the same sampradaya or group, one of the two practices need to be fixed as true as otherwise the tendency of whimsical behavior is encouraged amongst the followers (as they are left to their choice for some common practice). This is a discussable issue.

One of the suggestions that came was to follow the acara of our own gotra as is going on for generations. (from student at Madhva Gurukula at Mumbai). For example, if your gotra has acara of tying sikha while evacuating then follow that despite a different acara in other gotra.

Actually in Madhva sampradaya itself there is difference in some acaras in different places and that is allowable.

11. **Sikha to be tied or not while answering call of nature?

Not a direct conclusive reference, but I found this in Hari-bhakti-vilasa:

tataścācamya vidhivat kṛtvā keśa prasāadhanam

smṛtvā praṇava gāyatriṇi nibandhanīyāt śikhāṁ tataḥ ||3.235||

tatra ca uktam (rāmārcana candrikāyām)—

na dakṣiṇāmukho norddhvaṁ kuryāt keśa prasāadhanam

smṛtvā omkāraṁcagāyatrīṁ nibandhanīyāt śikhāṁ tataḥ ||3.236||

The essence of the above two verses is “thereafter make your hairs (keśa prasāadhanam) and then tie your śikhā.” Now the context is that at the end of aruṇodaya one should go out and answer nature’s call (about 100 meter’s distance from village or any house) and then perform purification by washing hands (by specific procedure) and then perform ācamana (by specific procedure) and then these two slokas mention keśa-prasādhānam which means to make hair. Then tie śikhā. This is before taking bath. Now in the digdarśini sanātana gosvāmī mentions “dvija iti snāne śudrasya mukta śikhavāt” meaning “here it is mentioned about dvija because śudra is supposed to take bath with open śikhā.” This means that dvija is to take bath with tied śikhā. Now there may be two cases:

a. śikhā is already opened while going to answer nature’s call. And then there is keśa prasāadhanam and then śikhā is tied before bath.

b. śikhā is already tied while going to answer nature’s call and when keśa prasāadhanam starts it is opened to make hair and then again tied.

So it may not be conclusive. There is no mention of tying or untying śikhā after waking up. So it may be accepted that the condition of śikhā remains as what was at the time of going to sleep. So some more study is needed in this part.

It will be good if I am able to get a few references Your Holiness has come across for both opinions in this matter – that may help me in further research.

Madhvas and Smartas of South India (asked to smartas in Sringeri, Madhvas of Pejavara, Puttige, and Uttaradi Matha) keep sikha tied while evacuating (they also wrap their head with a piece of cloth) and open it just before taking bath. Then after taking bath and before sandhyavandanam they again tie their sikha.

From Vasanthacarya (Madhva scholar in Baroda, famous among Madhvas):

gacchan śauca kriyāyāntu brāhmaṇo viṣṇumayo dvijaḥ vastre śikhāyām mumucuḥ na tu skandagato pumān|

“while going to answer call of nature a brahmana desiring salvation should cloth wrap his (head) so that the sikha doesn’t touch the (or go up to the) shoulder.” (original source unknown to him).

12. Why is stone considered impure for eating from? In Bengal it is considered pure.

13. HBV 2.145 states one should not eat from a plate made of bell metal. But doing so is traditional and considered pure throughout Bengal and North India. Any insights on this?

14. Is it correct that traditionally there was no payment in temples? Instead there were grants of land to sevaitis, plus a regular share of the prasada, etc.

15. Two pancapatra system.

In Madhvas, pancapatra term is used for completely different purpose – there is pancapatra puja. If Your Holiness meant acaman-cup by the word pancapatra then in Madhvas there is one vessel for water for hasta-praksalana and another vessel to collect praksalana water. They purify their hands before each upacara offering. Another thing I came to know is that many times they do not use praksalana for purifying hands but use mantras for the same purpose.

In pusti-marga they use one container for suddha-jala and another for catching the water of praksalana.

16. If when urinating urine goes on the leg, is it required to fully bathe for purification?

From Madhvas: Depends on the services you have to do later. If you are to do any anusthana (including sandhya-vandanam) then you need to take bath. Otherwise for adhyayana etc. you don’t need to take bath. Another option is kaTI-snAnaM (bath till the waist).

17. The arati items represent the five elements, all to be offered to Kṛṣṇa. Incense—earth cos of smell. Lamp—fire. Conch—water. Camara—ether. Fan—air.

18. We generally offer odd number of items in arati—1,3, or 5 incense sticks, lamps, etc. What is the significance of this number?

Check Pancaratras for this.

19. Why is it OK to sleep but not eat facing south?

20. Dates given for Caturmas seem out of sync with the rainy season and maybe needs re-alignment.

There is some detail of caturmasya (as followed in Raghavendra Matha, Udupi) given on <https://sites.google.com/site/harshalarajesh/chaturmasya>.

From Smrtyarthasagara of chalarinarasimhacarya, Uttaradi Matha:

aṣāḍhaśuklaikādaśyām devasya mahāpūjām kṛtvā cāturmāsyavratasaṃkalpaḥ kāryaḥ|
taduktam bhaviṣye --

mahāpūjām tataḥ kuryāddevadevasya cakriṇaḥ| jātikusumamālābhirmantreṇānena
pūjayet|| supte tvayi jagannātha jagatsuptam bhavedidam| vibuddhe ca vibuddhyeta
prasanno me bhavācyuta|| caturo vāṣikān māsan devadeva jagatpate| nirvighnam
siddhimāyātu prasādatava keśava|| gr̥hīte'sminvrate deva pañcatvam yadi me bhavet|
tadā bhavetsusampūrṇam prasādatte janārdana||

“O Lord! If you sleep the whole Universe too sleeps. If you are awake the whole Universe is awake. O Lord, take kindly to me. Till Kartika-sukla-ekadasi when you rise from your sleep, during the rainy season, we shall observe saka, dadhi, ksira and dvidala vratas. Please ensure that we do not face obstacles when we observe them. Hepl us fulfill the vartas. If I die after beginning this vrata, please bless me so that I get the merit of fulfilling it.” (Translation from Sadacara Sangraha by Pejvara Matha's Sri Krishna Sri Raghavendra Trust)

Thus it seems that the main factor deciding time of caturmasya's beginning is the time of Lord's sleeping and not rainy season and thus even if it goes out of sync we may not change its time in order to sync it with rainy season. Till date Madhvas are following caturmasya in the same time as prescribed above.

HBV 15.108 onwards speaks about caturmasya (slokas similar to above are quoted there).

Pusti-marga scholar: There is no need to realign the date of caturmasya as the reason for caturmasya is not monsoon season but Lord's going to sleep. In His lila in goloka when He goes to sleep he is to give intimate association to His devotees and thus there is an excuse of sleep. So in caturmasya the pusti understanding is that Lord goes to yoga-nidra means this is the chance to take His intimate association and thus they follow austerity and stay more at home and serve more. They are supposed to have this feeling in following caturmasya and not for either gaining some material benefit or getting free from material bondage. He said that the sannyasis are supposed to be on the top most platform of relation to Lord and thus they stop travelling and get the opportunity of intimate association of the Lord in these four months doing more bhajan. Rainy season also comes in this time and thus to some extent there is matching but that is not the main reason for sannyasis to do caturmasa. Some people have misinterpreted 4 months to be 2 months by interpreting masa as paksa.

21. Rising early and bathing difficult in pre-electricity days. HBV seems to state to wake deities, do mangala, even before bathing.

I asked Pusti Margi old strict vaisnavas staying in a village and are farmers, and also a pusti marga scholar at Bharuch. I asked Rama Ramana Prabhu from Jamnagar (he has good memories from his village childhood life). I asked different old scholars in Madhva sampradaya. I asked to Vinayaka Udupa and Principal of Sringeri Veda Pathasala (both are old). I asked to two old villagers one in Kumbakonam (administrator of Raja Veda Pathasala, stayed in village without electricity in childhood) and the other chief founder of RSS gurukula (Prabodhini Gurukula) at Hariharapura (40 kms from Sringeri) who has some memories of his old dying village life.

All the above persons informed that people used to get up about 2 hours before sunrise and the first thing they used to do was to go to evacuate at distant place in dark and then

take bath in a river and then puja (more astonishingly women used to get up earlier and finish their nitya-kriya before men wakes up). Regarding practical problem of darkness and fear there are different experiences. In the sources from South India they all informed about a type of stick made with arecanut tree's bark that when fired on one end lasts long enough to finish the work. They have seen people using these to lit up hand holding in hand, although in rains it is quite difficult and they do not remember much of situation in rainy season. The pusti-marga farmer of Junagadh district informed me that they used to go without any lighting, their eyes were powerful enough and they did not have much fear. Rama Ramana Prabhu from Jamnagar told me the same thing he witnessed in his village in childhood. Many villagers in Gujarat told the same thing previously (while in my search for land I asked them some of these questions).

In Madhva Sampradaya, in all branches there is rule to take bath early in the morning in dark from time immemorial and deities are waked up only after the pujari has taken bath. From Srimad Bhagavatam, Canto 10 Chapter 70, we see that Lord Sri Krsna took bath early in the morning (woke up almost 3 hours before sunrise) as he had to become ready for sandhya-vandanam and agnihotra that were to be finished before sunrise according to His gotra.

Thus it seems that going out for evacuating in dark and taking bath was not a major issue for olden day villagers. Regarding HBV's recommending having mangala-arati without bath, we may accept it as our acarya's recommended acara. But then our recent ācārya has not recommended or established this acara and thus epistemologically we need to accept the acara of our latest ācārya (Srila Prabhuapada). So in my conclusion we need to adjust ourselves to be able to go to evacuate and take bath early in the morning in dark.

22. **How can dharma change? Maṇḍūkā Muni. Actually I'm not sure that's the right name. Anyway, he was unfairly punished by Yama and the laws of the universe became changed after that, the young children don't become culpable. How about that? The laws of the universe changed, that happened in some other time also, its stated in *Mahabharata* that at some point marriage was instituted, there was no marriage previously.

This is also visible in Srimad Bhagavatam, canto 11, when Lord Krsna mentions that previously in satya-yuga there was only one hamsa category and there was no varnasrama in place. Then rules of varnasrama were introduced in treat-yuga. Here we see that rules did change. As far as I understand all the rules are eternal and they are just implemented in the society as per time, place, and circumstance. For instance, in a society that is very pure, where men and women both are very detached and dedicated to cultivate pure devotional service, there is no lusty mentality of sex life. There you do not need to have marriage institution to control lust (or dharma-viruddha kama). It is understood that the female will approach male only for the sake of having progeny that becomes Krsna Conscious (out of dharma) and not out of desire to satisfy sex urge. But later when it was found that there is degradation in the consciousness of citizens then there arose a need to control the whimsical sex behavior and thus there was an introduction of marriage institution. Otherwise we run the risk of rejecting a great body of instructions in Vedas dealing with marriage. For instance about four types of wives of a brahmana and about his son from brahmana wife to be a brahmana. Now as we take Veda as unchangeable (in structure and text also) we cannot reject this. As the modern scholars do not accept the absolute

authority of Veda and also consider them to be a creation of a later date, they explain this as evidence to their accepted fact that Vedas are created after period of the ancient society when marriage was not in place. If we carefully think at the text in Mahabharata that mentioned about no marriage society (told by King Puru to Kunti) we see that he mentions that it was considered dharma for woman to approach to any male of choice and get a son from him. Now with sastric faith we definitely know that this must not be meaning free mixing of men and women (yah sastras vidhim utsrjya) as independent behavior cannot be source of dharma – if it is, then we are to say that animals are more dharmika than humans which is contrary to Mahabharata (ahara-nidra-bhaya-maithunam ca). Thus another explanation is that people of this era were so exalted that there was no need of marriage institution to restrain their sexual activities. In such an era if marriage institution is there then it may become the cause of their fall down because it may encourage them to have more sex (there always being a tie between one man and women), something like legalized prostitution. So this explanation also fits logic and keeps the authority and eternity of Vedas intact.

In short my opinion is that all the rules mentioned in the Vedas are eternal but are implemented according to the adhikara of the society. Many times persons like svetaketu become a means to change a particular rule (current in that society) judging the adhikara of the society being changed.

Also in some cases the powerful persons (specifically devotees) in the universe may have been given the authority to create some rule which is then made eternal by the Lord. This is acintya as this brings in picture the divine intervention of the all eternal Lord. This may be something similar to the spiritual energies of the Lord always increasing although they are eternal (how can something that has increased, means changed, be eternal?). Logic is that being eternal needs to consider time factor which is in hands of the Lord and thus Lord can make anything eternal by His divine intervention. This cannot be accepted by those who do not have faith in inconceivable powers of the Lord.

23. Garland from behind is for dead bodies?

24. It's common that parents eat their kid's leftovers. Check what is done in traditional families.

Madhvas say that this is not the acara in strict followers in their sampradaya. Smartas (Vinayaka Udupa and Principal of Veda Pathasala) of Sringeri echo the same point.

But one Madhva person in Kumbakonam told that it is not wrong if the child is younger than 5 years as he is considered the part of father's body. After upanayanam of the child this acara is wrong. He gave example that when very young, the child's stool and urine are cleaned by parents and it is not considered wrong, but when the same child grows up then the same acara is considered wrong.

One more strange thing I found about Madhva is that they do not take ucchista of their guru, there is no such ritual at all.

25. Responsively chanting mantras may not be necessary as in vrndayai tulasi devyai, in yajnas and puspanjali, sarira avidya jala. Check Gauḍīya Mathas.

26. ** Offering obeisances to a sannyasi or a guru is a vidhi; so is not offering obeisances in the temple to any other than the deity. What is to be done if one sees a sannyasi or guru within the temple? How do the Madhvas and Śris resolve this?

According to the rules and regulations, no one should accept obeisances in the temple of the Lord before the Deity. Nor is it proper for a devotee to offer obeisances and touch the feet of the spiritual master before the Deity. This is considered an offense. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu Himself was personally the Supreme Personality of Godhead; therefore it was not actually offensive to wash His lotus feet in the temple. However, because He was playing the part of an ācārya, the Lord considered Himself an ordinary human being. He also wanted to give instructions to ordinary human beings. The point is that even though one plays the part of a spiritual master, he should not accept obeisances or permit a disciple to wash his feet before the Deity. This is a matter of etiquette. (Cc. 2.12.127, purport)

Regarding practice of Madhvas and Sris, I have to ask to them.

Madhvas have two practices. Some of them do not pay obeisances to guru in front of the Lord (they may just acknowledge and respect the arrival of guru by kṛta-anjali, joining hands and standing up). Another group does pay obeisances to guru in front of the Lord with the meditation that they are paying obeisances to the Lord inside the heart of their guru (this meditation is there in all madhvas whenever they pay obeisances to guru either in front of Lord or otherwise). Vasanthacarya from Baroda has this practice.

The pusti-marga vaisnava farmers I met told that their guru does not allow them to pay obeisances to him in front of the Lord. Pusti marga scholar at Bharuch said the same thing. He said that guru also doesn't his praise in front of the Lord neither does he sit on a raised asana in front of the Lord.

27. Should the conch be held pointing to the personality to whom water is offered? Is perpendicular ok?

Vasanthacarya: Yes, pointing to the personality it is being offered to. It should be hold in the palm (utthanapani) not with fingers (if too small can be hold with fingers).

28. **In other sampradayas, are pranaam mantras chanted while bowed down, or after rising?

...(29) One should not offer obeisances silently to the spiritual master, or in other words, one should recite aloud the prayers to the spiritual master while offering obeisances. [Nectar of Devotion, Ch.8]

The aparadha mentioned here in sequence by Srila Prabhupada is not mentioned in the original bhakti-rasamṛta-sindhu where it is quoted from hari-bhakti-vilasa where it is mentioned to be quoted from an agama (most probably from varaha or padma purana). All the offenses in the list goes well with the sloka except this one. In the sloka in the place of this offense is mentioned “pareṣām abhivādanam” which literally means to welcome anyone else in front of the Lord.

Regarding practice of other sampradayas, I have to ask to them.

Madhvas and Smartas quote the same sloka for this (definition of sastanga dandavat pranama):

urasā śirasā dr̥ṣṭyā, manasā vacasā tathā| padbhyām karābhyām jānubhyām,
praṇāmo'stāṅga īritah||

“Astanga Pranama is offered by these eight elements: By Chest, by forehead, by sight, by mind, by speech, by hands, by thighs, by legs.”

This is also mentioned in HBV 8.361 including vacasā for pancanga pranama also. Thus it can be concluded that pranama mantra is to be chanted while in the mudra of pranama so as to complete eight or five angas of pranama. This is the practice in Madhva and Smarta sampradayas of South India till date.

Another point in this regard that HBV 8.362 (digdarsini) adds is that at least three pranamas to be offered not less than that. Same is seen in acara of Madhva sannyasis of Udupi. I have also seen some grhastha Madhvas following the same.

[HBV 8.362, digdarsini:-- trīn praṇāmān avaśyaṁ kuryāt, yacca namaskāreṇa caikenetyādikamgre lekhyam tacca mātmyaparātayaiva, na tu vidheyatvena| yathā ekapradakṣiṇāyā niśedhatve'pi 'pradakṣiṇena caikena' ityādikam mātmyaparamēva saṅgacchate, anyathātivirodhāt]

“One should offer three pranams at least, although it was written before statements like ‘even just by one pranama’ etc., it was for emphasizing the mahatmya of pranama and not as an injunction. As although it is prohibited to circumambulate (pradakṣiṇa) only once and still statements like ‘just by one pradakṣiṇa’ etc. they are for emphasizing the mahatmya only. The reason for it is that otherwise it will be virodhi (opposite) to the injunctions mentioned at other places.”]

Pusti-marga scholar at Bharuch: No concept of pranama mantra to be chanted in process of bowing down. Bhavana of surrender is taken as the key.

29. Is **bokul** offerable even after being stepped on? If people have been walking in that area, does it all become unofferable?

Vasanthacarya (Baroda): No it cannot be offered if stepped on or even fell down. Tie a clean cloth (dedicated exclusively for that purpose) to collect the flowers to offer.

30. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, persons are regularly addressed without honorifics other than Śrī. E.g., śrī-śuka uvāca. In Bg 10.13, Nārada, Asita, Devala and Vyāsa are referred to without honorifics. In Cc, Raghunātha dāsa is recorded as saying, *more 'caitanya' deha*.⁷¹ Is this acceptable just for verse composition or is it a difference to the modern etiquette of addressing respected persons with honorifics? E.g. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

31. **The authors of Hari Bhakti Vilasa maybe were writing for more than just Gaudiya Vaisnavas or were writing at a time when Gauḍiṇya Vaiṣṇavism had not become such a distinct doctrine. Observance of Sivaratri is mentioned whereas no observance of Radhastami is mentioned, salagrama and dvaraka silas are mentioned but no mention of govardhana silas. It seems that Hari Bhakti Vilasa was written at a time when many customs and doctrines of Gaudiya Vaisnavism were not as codified as they are today.

There is good reason to believe that Haribhaktivilasa was compiled for a wider audience of Vaisnavas than the Gaudiyas.

To me it seems that Hari Bhakti Vilasa has been composed keeping in view that all the sampradayas are going to be reinstated in to their practices due to the worldwide revolution brought about by sankirtana movement and establishment of dharma per say. This I remembered from Your Holiness' statement in Dvaraka after Your Vyasa-puja when you were talking to a person from pusti marga: you told to him that in future all the sampradayas will be reinstated into their own practices properly due to the effect of sankirtana movement.

In the beginning the author introduces Hari-bhakti-vilasa as the treatise outlining activities of all vaisnavas. This is evident all over the grantha for instance when description of tilaka is going on. The mahatmya of urdhva-pundra (tilaka) is same for all the sampradayas. But when the procedure is mentioned the materials and shape are instructed to be selected according to one's own sampradaya. Similarly in worship procedures, the general procedures mentioned are the same while for certain mantras it is instructed to be selected according to sampradaya (sampradaya anusaratah). There are many such instances where *sampradaya anusaratah* consideration is there.

Thus it is quite different from smrtis created for a particular sampradaya (like sadacara smrti of Madhvacarya, etc) wherein the practices expected to be followed by a particular sampradaya are enlisted and detailed. Hari-bhakti-vilasa seems to be more like manu or yajnavalkya smrti (sampradaya unspecific) but while the later caters to a broader audience the former caters specifically to vaisnavas.

Regarding mention of Radhastami and govardhana silas, I have not yet read full Hari-bhakti-vilasa. But I do not expect these to be in this grantha because that seems to be specifically for Gaudiya Vaisnavas as Radha bhakti was brought specifically by Caitanya Mahaprabhu's line. Still I need to finish reading of Hari-bhakti-vilasa with digdarsini. It may so happen that something is mentioned in the digdarsini but not in the mula text. For example, after mentioning the whole process of deity worship (for grhasthas) at last in the digdarsini special mention is there for the pure devotees who accept the form of the Lord in and off itself as Lord and they do not need to do pranapratishta but instead seva-prakasa. For such worshippers the different mudras mentioned before are not to be followed. This is a clarification for gaudiya vaisnavas, not in the mula text but in the digdarsini. Also Srila Prabhupada writes in one of his purports to Cc. that Hari-bhakti-vilasa is to be applied in our society through the medium of digdarsini commentary.

If we accept the view that at the time of Sanatana gosvami, Radhastami and govardhana sila worship were not codified in the customs of our sampradaya, then we need to search out when and by whom these were introduced and how are they accepted as bonafide. Are there other acaryas in our sampradaya who have made elaborate contributions to codes of worship except Sanatana Gosvami and Gopala-bhatta Gosvami? If so then why did they not write a commentary itself on the treatises (hari-bhakti-vilasa and sat-kriya-sara-dipika) composed by the gosvamis? After all as

the subject matter discussed is of the same category (say festivals to be celebrated and worship procedures) then if another treatise is composed then it may create vaisnava-vyatikrama. We see that in Caitanya Caritamṛta Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvami mentions that as his grantha discusses the same subject as Vṛndāvanadāsa Thākura's grantha so he will not mention the incidents already mentioned by Vṛndāvanadāsa Thākura. So the grantha that mentions the more elaborate codes for the Gaudiya Vaisnavas to follow (like radhastami and govardhana sila worship), should be clearly acknowledging hari-bhakti-vilāsa and sat-kriya-sara-dīpikā and also mentioning the reason for need of its composition. So these questions need to be looked into if we accept this view.

Moreover, Sanātana Gosvami is frequently using the words "sampradaya anuśarataḥ." So then if he was writing a smṛti for all vaisnavas for those times only then it can be argued that there was no need to write a separate smṛti as all other vaisnava sampradāyas did have their smṛtis in place and practice; why they would agree to accept hari-bhakti-vilāsa in place of theirs? And if Sanātana Gosvami was writing for Gaudiya Vaisnavas then there was no need to mention "sampradaya anuśarataḥ." So it seems that hari-bhakti-vilāsa is written for future for all vaisnava sampradāyas.

Another possibility may be that he is writing for the societies governed by Gaudiya Vaisnavas and having all vaisnavas as its subjects. Something like having a Gaudiya Vaisnava king and governance. This is probable because if we are able to establish varṇasrama communities then other vaisnavas may want to be part of our communities because they will be able to follow their own principles better in our communities. But they may not want to (and it may not be even correct to) change to being a follower of our sampradaya.

Another point is that Śrīla Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvatī Thākura asked to make hari-bhakti-vilāsa as the smṛti of our sampradaya and our own Śrīla Prabhupāda supported this view adding that digdarsinī commentary should be consulted before applying it in our sampradaya. This indicates that the main guiding smṛti for our sampradaya should be hari-bhakti-vilāsa.

Difference between hari-bhakti-vilāsa and Manu or Yajñavalkya smṛtis:

A complete smṛti that can guide a society in all its matters consists of *acara-kanda*, *vyavahara-kanda*, and *prayascitta-kanda*. *Acara-kanda* consists of daily practices and schedules, as well as occasional activities and festivals to be celebrated (nitya and naimittika karmas). *Vyavahara-kanda* consist directions for social organization (duties of a king, etc). *Prayascitta-kanda* enlists legal cases and punishments to be enforced for different aparādhās etc. Hari-bhakti-vilāsa has *acara-kanda* only. It seems that the other two don't differ for vaisnavas as well as non-vaisnavas (we may remember the case of Gopinātha Pāṭṇāyaka's arrest in Cc where Lord Caitanya didn't approve of his misappropriating king's money although king was a yavana while Gopinātha Pāṭṇāyaka was a devotee and in relation to rāmananda-rāya, most beloved of Lord Caitanya). So to govern whole society hari-bhakti-vilāsa doesn't seem to

be sufficient. For instance, in our community if someone commits theft of Rs.1,00,000. Then what should be the actions taken on him? Hari-bhakti-vilasa doesn't guide us on this and we need to consult Manu or Yajnavalkya smṛti. Moreover even if we try to establish a society purely of vaiṣṇavas it seems inevitable that few generations down the line, if not earlier, there will also be mixed devotees and non-devotees in our community as it is not guaranteed that one who takes birth in a devotee family will necessarily become a devotee. Thus in my understanding we also need to consult paraśara-smṛti which is meant for kali-yuga in general.

32. Vaiṣṇavas playing Holi, throw on Kṛṣṇa only, small deity

33. **While chanting the mahamantra, many devotees chant Hare Ram instead of Hare Rama. In doing so, is the form changed from sambhodaṇa? In other words, is it required to chant the last "a"?

I asked this to Jayanityananda Prabhu. He said that according to saṁskṛta vyākaraṇa "raṁ" is not correct and thus there is no question of its form being changed from sambodhana to some other. Thus if sambodhana is considered according to vyākaraṇa then "rama" is the only correct version, "raṁ" doesn't make any sense according to vyākaraṇa..

34. Why not celebrate Guru-purnima instead of individual Vyasa-pujas?

I am glad to learn that you have performed the Guru Purnima Ceremony by Kirtana that is all right. But this Guru Purnima is generally performed by the Mayavadi sects. The idea of Guru Purnima is to offer gratitude to the Spiritual Master by the disciple once in a year. That is called Guru Purnima. So far as we are concerned, Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavas, we offer all our gratefulness to the Spiritual Master on His Appearance Day Ceremony, called Vyasa Puja. So kirtana is our daily function; whatever you have done is all right, but actual worship of the Spiritual Master will be done by all of my disciples on the fifth day of September, just one day after Janmastami. (Letter to Gaurasundara, Los Angeles, 2 Aug, 1969)

In Mādhvas individual Vyasa-pujas are celebrated but at very low profile. It is not a big festival and the disciples of a guru get together (not all disciples from very far) and glorify etc. The procedure is not very standardized. Some glorify guru, some serve him more, some cook some special feast, etc. Some places they do not celebrate it.

The pusti-mārgī farmer vaiṣṇavas I met told that on the birthday of their guru, they also do not celebrate it very grand but go to guru on that day and either give him donations, do more service etc. Same point by pusti-mārga scholar at Bharuch.

One reason for vyasa-puja not being very grand may be that they have their guru locally available with not many disciples.

35. **? Grhasthas don't wear kaupin so how can they do puja wearing underpants or other sewn cloth?

I could not understand why grhasthas do not wear kaupins. May be Your Holiness is mentioning some rule from tradition or sastras which I am not aware of. If Your Holiness can kindly clarify this question in more detail it will be easier for me to look into it.

36. HBV says that someone may be a bhakta but not a Vaiṣṇava. NB: When a devotee is great he is called prabhu, and when he is lesser he is called bhakta, or a devotee. Ref. VedaBase => Adi 6.99

37. **? What is the meaning of raag: Goddess Sarasvatī, the dearest beloved of the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, then taught Nārada the different rāgas and rāgiṇīs, their derivatives, the proper times and places for the different kinds of music, the different rhythms, the five-hundred-and-sixty-million divisions and numberless sub-divisions of scales, the various dances, the different musical instruments, and the different kinds of modulation.

Raag may technically have many meanings. So I need to know Your Holiness' purpose in this question. Is Your Holiness asking me the meaning of raag in the rest of the statement of your question? If so then I need to know the source of the statement you have mentioned. Then I can look in to it.

38. Once a year festival deity—is there any sastric or traditional precedent for this?

Vasanthacarya (baroda): Festival Deity is the small deity that is there in temples called utsava murti. But there is daily seva for that murti. There is no such thing as once a year served murti for festivals in his notice.

39. **Astrological definition of birth time—when the child's head appears or whole body is out?

"It is enjoined in the śāstras that as long as a child is joined with the mother by the navel pipe, the child is considered to be of one body with the mother, but as soon as the pipe is cut and the child is separated from the mother, the purificatory process of jātakarman is performed." (SB 1.12.14, purport)

Also age is generally considered not from the date of jata-karman but from the time of conception. Thus in case of a twin, the one that comes out first is the younger and the one that comes out last is the elder. I do not know if this consideration is there also for astrological calculations or not.

I asked one astrologer, Bhakticaru Maharaja's disciple from Indore. He is a paramparik smarta karma-kandiya brahmana still practicing and depending on it. He has learn

jyotisa in paramparā from Ujjain. He is practicing it also. He told that there are three times that are considered: 1. Time of conception 2. Time when the child just starts appearing out (or is just visible) 3. when he is fully out. He said that in the 2nd and 3rd point, there is hardly a difference of five minutes and thus in majority of cases the kundali comes out the same in either consideration. 2nd and 3rd are the most commonly used consideration today (for many years). 1st is very rarely now. One reason he suspects is that because today even the parents do not know the time of conception due to free sex. He could not give me exact references as he did not ask for references to his guru while learning.

Still I need to ask a few more astrologers and get references for confirmed answer.

40. International date line and astrology; when does the day begin according to Vedic reckoning in e.g. Japan? Would it not be almost a day behind India rather than ahead?

The location of first beginning of the day may be taken not from sunrise etc events but the events like grahana (eclipses), sankrantis, amavasya, etc. where it is easier to judge its first appearance. For example, wherever amavasya is first seen the next day next month starts there. Thus day is automatically fixed. (Explained by Rasananda Prabhu at Srirangam learned some Jyotisa in Madhva Sampradaya in his gurukula days in Pejvara Matha).

41. Is hibiscus ok for puja if not red. Sanskrit name: japa.

Vasanthacarya (Baroda): Yes, if not red Japa can be offered. Details in Tantrasara (to be found).

Another information – hibiscus usually do not have smell and thus flowers without fragrance are not to be offered although not red colored.
[http://www.bbg.org/gardening/article/heavenly_hibiscus]

42. Crossing over or under japa beads

43. prakṣālya vidhi-vat pādaū: Balarāma bathed his feet in accordance with the injunctions of scripture.ⁱⁱⁱ Which injunctions of scripture?

44. In pancanga pranama should the backside be up or tucked in?

Tucked in says persons from Madhva sampradaya I asked to. But they too do not look very sure in this as much as they are sure for answering about sastanga pranama. They do not have any reference for this.

45. **The hand does not require washing after sipping caranamrta, since caranamrta purifies the lips and therefore the lips do not contaminate the hand. The Agastya-samhita states: "The water that has washed the lotus feet of Lord Visnu or a pure

Vaisnava is equal to the combined waters of all the places of pilgrimage. After drinking such caranamṛta, one does not need to take acamana or wash his hands and mouth." If, however, you are going to touch the sastra or similarly worshipable objects after taking caran-amṛta, you should rinse your hand with water. (>>> Ref. VedaBase => Pancaratra Pradipa 2.3: The Main Worship)

If caranamṛta thus purifies the lips, why does Visnu prasada not do so?

And if the hand is not contaminated, why should it be rinsed before touching sastra? It could be said that the hand is sticky, but from that consideration it should be rinsed anyway. And if the hands are to be rinsed before touching something sacred, then they should certainly be rinsed, as a devotee is certain to touch something sacred.

And if there is sastra vidhi not to rinse the hand after taking caranamṛta, then why did Srila Prabhupada do so and why is it the standard in ISKCON to do so?

This sloka from agastya samhita is quoted in Hari-bhakti-vilasa 9.90-91. Then in the digdarsini sanatana gosvami writes:

ācamanam na hi naiva kuryāditi asprśyasparśanādinā kathañcit prāptamācamanam caraṇodakapānāntaram punastat śuddhaye na kuryāt | yadvā, ‘snātvā bhuktvā payaḥ pītvā’ ityādinā jalapānāntaram smṛtivyahitam yadācamanam tat śrīcaraṇodakapānāntaram na kāryam ityarthah | evaṁca, pipāsayā caraṇodakasya pānam vijñeyam, na ca prāśanarūpamācamanamātramiti||

“ācamanam na hi means must not do i.e. the ācamana that one needs to perform to purify oneself when one gets contamination by acts like touching an untouchable thing (described before in the acamana section) one must not perform after drinking caraṇodaka for purifying oneself. As it is stated, ‘snātvā bhuktvā payaḥ pītvā’ (meaning after taking bath, eating and drinking water or liquids) after drinking water one needs to perform ācamanam as described in smṛtis (procedure described before) but after drinking caraṇodaka one need not (or must not) perform that ācamanam. Also, it is to be understood that the ācamanam that is prohibited here is (specifically) the one that is for drinking, means drinking of caraṇodaka is mentioned and is not generalized (to prohibit ācamanam) for all types of eating (connected to Lord and His devotees).”

From here it is clear that the ācamana that we generally mean (washing of hand or putting three drops to purify minor contamination) is not talked about, but the elaborate ācamanam with mantras (either 3, 12, or 25) is being talked about. This ācamanam is needed to purify oneself after eating, drinking, spitting, bathing, etc. So drinking caraṇāmṛta is not in the same category of drinking other liquids and it is ordered not to perform elaborate ācamanam. However this rule cannot be generalized to mean eating prasādam also, that is warned by sanatana gosvami in digdarsini. But there may be practical need to wash hands or rinse it after drinking caraṇāmṛta in order to get rid of stickiness, etc. However, this is not ācamanam mentioned, in that if it would have been normal water that was drunk then this rinsing of hand would not have purified us of the

contamination (that could have been purified only by elaborate ācamanam). Thus we can justify Srila Prabhupada's rinsing hands after drinking caraṇodaka.

Also, in this section of HBV, I am not able to come to conclusion that the injunction of not performing ācamanam is 'must not' or 'need not.' I may need to consult some Sanskrit expert for this.

Regarding Pancarātra Pradīpa, it seems that the translator or compiler has misinterpreted ācamanam as "washing hands and mouth." He might not have consulted digdarsini commentary while reading from Hari-bhakti-vilasa or else he might have directly got this verse from agastya samhita and in absence of commentary this point was not clarified. More light can be had only after consulting the devotee who has rendered Pancaratra-pradipa.

Madhvas do not have acamana after sipping caranamrta (tirtham). Nor do they wash hands. The reason for not rinsing hands may be that in their sampradaya usually tirtham is served which is just plain water with some little tulasi mixed and thus hands do not become sticky.

46. rules for cutting plants – according to Sanskritananda, before cutting plants to be used as medicine, one should go to them the night before and recite mantras for forgiveness.

Madhvas recite this while taking medicine (as recently there is directly taking medicine and not cutting plants etc.):

śarīre jarjarībhūte vyādhigraste kalevare| auśadham jāhnavītoyam vaidya nārāyaṇo hariḥ||

"On body's becoming shattered, or diseased, ganga water is the medicine and Lord Narayana is the doctor."

Vasanthacarya (Baroda): Chant Rgveda mantras called Yavosadhi sukta... (97th adhyAya 10th manDala, 1 to 23). From Greta I got this sukta as below (RV_10,097.01a - RV_10,097.23c):

yā ośadhīḥ pūrvā jātā devebhyas triyugam purā | manai nu babhrūṇām ahaṁ śataṁ dhāmāni sapta ca || śataṁ vo amba dhāmāni sahasram uta vo ruhaḥ | adhā śatakratvo yūyam imam me agadaṁ kṛta || ośadhīḥ prati modadhvam puṣpavatīḥ prasūvatīḥ | aśvā iva sajītvartī vīrudhaḥ pārayiṣṇvaḥ || ośadhīr iti mātaraś tad vo devīr upa bruve | saneyam aśvaṁ gāṁ vāsa ātmānaṁ tava pūruṣa || aśvatthe vo niśadanam parṇe vo vasatiḥ kṛtā | gobhāja it kilāśatha yat sanavatha pūruṣam || yatrauśadhīḥ samagmata rājānaḥ samitāv iva | vipraḥ sa ucyate bhiṣag rakṣohāmīvacātanāḥ || aśvāvatīm somāvatīm ūrjayantīm udojasam | āvīti sarvā ośadhīr asmā ariṣṭatātaye || uc chuṣmā ośadhīnām gāvo goṣṭhād iverate | dhanam saniṣyantīnām ātmānaṁ tava pūruṣa || iṣkṛtiḥ nāma vo mātātho yūyam stha niṣkṛtīḥ | sīrāḥ patatṛiṇī sthana yad āmayati niṣ kṛtha || ati viśvāḥ pariṣṭhā stena iva vrajam akramuḥ | ośadhīḥ prācucyavur yat kim ca tanvo rapaḥ || yad imā vājayann aham

oṣadhīr hasta ādadhe | ātmā yakṣmasya naśyati purā jīvagr̥bho yathā || yasyauṣadhīḥ
 prasarpāṅgam-aṅgam paruṣ-paruḥ | tato yakṣmaṃ vi bādhadhva ugro madhyamaśīr
 iva || sākaṃ yakṣma pra pata cāṣeṇa kikiḍivīnā | sākaṃ vātasya dhrājyā sākaṃ naśya
 nihākayā || anyā vo anyām avatv anyānyasyā upāvata | tāḥ sarvāḥ saṃvidānā idam me
 prāvata vacaḥ || yāḥ phalinīr yā aphalā apuṣpā yās ca puṣpiṇīḥ | br̥haspatiprasūtās tā no
 muñcantv aṃhasaḥ || muñcantu mā śapathyād atho varuṇyād uta | atho yamasya paḍbīśāt
 sarvasmād devakilbiṣāt || avapatantīr avadan diva oṣadhayas pari | yaṃ jīvam
 aśnavāmahai na sa riṣyāti pūruṣaḥ || yā oṣadhīḥ somarājñīr bahvīḥ śatavicaḥṣaṇāḥ | tāsāṃ
 tvam asy uttamāraṃ kāmāya śaṃ hr̥de || yā oṣadhīḥ somarājñīr viṣṭhitāḥ pṛthivīm anu |
 br̥haspatiprasūtā asyai saṃ datta vīryam || mā vo riṣat khanitā yasmai cāhaṃ khanāmi
 vaḥ | dvipac catuṣpad asmākaṃ sarvam astv anātūram || yās cedam upaśṛṇvanti yās ca
 dūram parāgatāḥ | sarvāḥ saṃgatya vīrudho 'syai saṃ datta vīryam || oṣadhayaḥ saṃ
 vadante somena saha rājñā | yasmai kṛṇoti brāhmaṇas taṃ rājan pārayāmasi || tvam
 uttamāsy oṣadhe tava vṛkṣā upastayaḥ | upastir astu so 'smākaṃ yo asmāṃ abhidāṣati ||

Translation by Griffith:

"1. HERBS that sprang up in time of old, three ages earlier than the Gods,- Of these, whose hue is brown, will I declare the hundred powers and seven. 2 Ye, Mothers, have a hundred homes, yea, and a thousand are your growths. Do ye who have a thousand powers free this my patient from disease. 3 Be glad and joyful in the Plants, both blossoming and bearing fruit, Plants that will lead us to success like mares who conquer in the race. 4 Plants, by this name I speak to you, Mothers, to you the Goddesses: Steed, cow, and garment may I win, win back thy very self, O man. 5 The Holy Fig tree is your home, your mansion is the Parna tree: Winners of cattle shali ye be if ye regain for me this man. 6 He who hath store of Herbs at hand like Kings amid a crowd of men,- Physician is that sage's name, fiend-slayer, chaser of disease. 7 Herbs rich in Soma, rich in steeds, in nourishments, in strengthening power,- All these have I provided here, that this man may be whole again. 8 The healing virtues of the Plants stream forth like cattle from the stall,- Plants that shall win me store of wealth, and save thy vital breath, O man. 9 Reliever is your mother's name, and hence Restorers are ye called. Rivers are ye with wings that fly: keep far whatever brings disease. 10 Over all fences have they passed, as steals a thief into the fold. The Plants have driven from the frame whatever malady was there. 11 When, bringing back the vanished strength, I hold these herbs within my hand, The spirit of disease departs ere he can seize upon the life. 12 He through whose frame, O Plants, ye creep member by member, joint by joint,- From him ye drive away disease like some strong arbiter of strife. 13 Fly, Spirit of Disease, begone, with the blue jay and kingfisher. Fly with the wind's impetuous speed, vanish together with the storm. 14 Help every one the other, lend assistance each of you to each, All of you be accordant, give furtherance to this speech of mine. 15 Let fruitful Plants, and fruitless, those that blossom, and the blossomless, Urged onward by Brhaspati, release us from our pain and grief; 16 Release me from the curse's plague and woe that comes from Varuna; Free me from Yama's fetter, from sin and offence against the Gods. 17 What time, descending from the sky, the Plants flew earthward, thus they spake: No evil shall befall the man whom while he liveth we pervade, 18 Of all the many Plants whose King is, Soma, Plants of hundred forms, Thou art the Plant most excellent, prompt to the wish, sweet to the heart. 19 O all ye various Herbs whose King is Soma, that o'erspread the earth, Urged onward by Brhaspati, combine your virtue in this Plant. 20 Unharm'd be he who digs you up, unharm'd the man for whom I dig: And let no malady attack biped or quadruped of ours. 21 All Plants that hear this speech, and those that have departed far away, Come all assembled and confer your healing power upon this Herb. 22 With Soma as their Sovran Lord the Plants hold colloquy and say: O King, we save from death the man whose cure a

Brahman undertakes. 23 Most excellent of all art thou, O Plant thy vassals are the trees. Let him be subject to our power, the man who seeks to injure us.”

47. Food prepared more than three hours before being eaten, food that is tasteless, decomposed and putrid, and food consisting of remnants and untouchable things is dear to those in the mode of darkness. (Bg 17.10) yāta-yāmam—food cooked three hours before being eaten; Srila Prabhupada comments: Any food cooked more than three hours before it is eaten (except prasādam, food offered to the Lord) is considered to be in the mode of darkness. Yet we often see that for feasts, cooking begins one or even two days earlier, and foods cooked even more than a day before are offered. Generally all foods are cooked and immediately offered, but on special occasions when there is much cooking it may not be. So presumably this refers only to perishable items like vegetables, not pickles, sweets etc. which have little or no water content, mostly milk products or ghee cooked with grains etc., which do not decay with time. Perhaps ayurveda could classify things like this.

Yajnavalkya smṛti, 1.169 says:

“The stale and long kept food may be eaten (if) oily. So also the various preparations of wheat, barley and milk though not oily.”

‘mItAkSarA’ of vijñānesvara on this:

"Food" eatables. "Stale" but if mixed with oily substances like ghee (clarified butter) &c., is fit for use though it might have been kept long. While transformations of wheat, barley and milk such as sweet-meat ball, (barley meal), cheese, insipidated milk &c., though not oily and kept long, are fit for use. Provided they have not undergone any change (for the worse by being so kept). Because of the following text of Vasistha Smṛiti (XIV. 37):

"Let him avoid wheat cakes, fried grain porridge, barley-meals, pulse-cakes, oil, rice, boiled in milk and vegetables that have turned sour by standing."

Markandeya Purana 35.1 also supports this. The word paryusita literally means kept standing for some time and thus 'yata-yama paryusita' means kept for more than one yama or 3 hours.

Manu Smṛti 5.24-25 supports that same explanation with addition of yajna-prasadam in to the list. [see pages 635-636 of the file named "Manu Smṛiti, Medhatithi, Ganganath Jha - 2.ENG Trans (commentary Included)(TEXT).pdf" that I have given to your holiness]

So the conclusion is that in case of food cooked from yava, wheat, etc and those cooked in ghee, oil, etc. and milk items, even though cooked long ago can be taken if they have not become spoiled (or turned sour in taste). The same rule goes for prasādam.

Pusti-marga-scholar in Bharuch: In pusti-marga there is whole vidhi for cooking for festivals. This vidhi can be had from him or any haveli in detail. It starts even 10 days before festival. First of all they start with baking flour 'vadi' (considered as an auspicious beginning sakun). Then they cook different things in series or days (items' sequence is fixed) cooking milk peda etc on the day before festival; sweet rice, rabadi etc. the same day morning, and sakthi (rice), dahl, sabji, etc. not before 3 hours of offering.

48. ** Is the classification of pakka/kaccha foods vedic, ayurvedic, or laukika?

I think it is vedic, ayurvedic as well as laukika. From parasara smṛti – *brahmacārī ca sannyāsī ca pakvāṇna svāminavubhau* meaning “brahmacārī and sannyāsī both are entitled to get cooked food grains.” In ayurveda also there is mention at many places to cook different items and not to take raw (śloka to be found and presented).

49. technically a pranam mantra for the deity is just that: he kṛṣṇa karuṇa sindho etc. for offering pranams to the Lord. it is rather obvious. a pranam mantra for guru is just that: namaste sarasvatī deva etc. should we substitute the guru pranam for the deity pranam, ? is guru = god? or is it an introduction to the deity pranam which should also be recited? what does gaudiya matha do? is this an iskcon thing? rather controversial of course.

In madhvas, at Kṛṣṇa Matha, they first offer pranams to Hanumanji, then to garuda and then to Kṛṣṇa. They chant the stutis of the corresponding deities. Also they told it not wrong to chant the pranama mantras of whole paramparā in front of the deities as Lord is never alone but with all the demigods and paramparā ācārya.

Actually Madhvas have really very different concept of seeing the world. They see everything in connection to demigods and the controlling svarūpa of the Lord. Even in cooking they have to remember controlling deity and demigod for each ingredient, while evacuating they remember the svarūpa of the Lord incharge of evacuation, etc. So for them it makes not much difference even if they chant or not chant the mantra of guru paramparā while paying obeisances to the Lord; the whole conception is that Lord is not alone neither the guru is alone and thus pranama is not offered to the deity alone although pranama mantra of deity alone is chanted.

50. Washing face in morning.

Question not clear to me. Request for more detail.

51. In Pundarik Prabhu's book on Ekadasi it is written that fasting observed without taking even water can be broken simply by taking caranamṛta or fruit, but that Ekadasi fasting observed by taking permitted foods such as vegetables should be broken by taking grains. What is the śāstra pramāṇa for this statement?
52. Did Bengali women previously usually wear white saris with a colored border only (as in photo of Śrīla Prabhupada's wife)?
53. ** Should gamcas be worn when sleeping, or the clothes that were worn in the day?

Hari-bhakti-vilāsa states (3.21): *vasanaṁ rātreḥ tyaktvā anyat paridhāya ca*, meaning “give up the clothes put on at night and wear another pure clothes.” digdarśinī says *rātreḥ-rātrau parihitaṁ ityarthah* meaning “rātreḥ means the clothes that have been put on at night.” From this it seems that there are clothes specifically meant to be worn at night while sleeping. Also digdarśinī quotes some verse that mentions *supta-vāsa* which may either mean clothes that are meant for sleeping or the ones that are on body after waking up.

In Madhvas they wear the clothes that were had on the day for sleeping at night.

anyadeva bhavedvāsah śayanīye narottama|| anyadrathyāsu devanāmarcāyāmanyadeva hi
(Mahabharat Anu. 104.83-87 – Quoted in KKKNK pdf p.25)

54. up/down sequence in mangala-arati tune is laukik, Vedic, practiced in G-Math?

55. Widows are often mentioned, but never the sati rite, which suggests that sati for the present age was never considered part of Gaudiya culture, even though sati continued to be common in Bengal well into the 19th century. What is your opinion about this, and about the prevalence of sati in other Vaisnava sampradayas, based on your readings of dharma-sastras?

There are quite a few references to widows in HBV, mostly something like "even widows and sudras can chant Hare Kṛṣṇa." I doubt that Dig-darsani comments on the status of widows, but please keep it in mind when reading HBV and check to see if Dig-darsani mentions anything about this.

56. What is the origin of the term "kanaka-kamini"?

57. why are blue and red cloth proscribed?

58. Covering Head (parda system) for married women was a tradition but what about this in South India?

Srila Prabhupada said: Formerly a woman's status could be understood simply by her dress: a married woman kept her head covered.

>>> Ref. VedaBase => TD 1-9: Sri Dhama Mayapur

Why is it that in South India married women are not expected to cover their hair?

Pusti-marga scholar at Bharuch: He didn't know about the absence of this practice in traditional South India. He said that the practice of women covering head is coming right from Goloka Vrindavana. All the gopis cover their head and thus Vallabhacarya has given them the procedure to cover their head while worshipping or even going in front of the Lord. All jivas are prakṛti and thus they cannot be in front of Puruṣa without covering their head. when I said that this may be the ritual thinking of North Indian that women is to cover head and that is considered giving respect, but South Indians may have something different or opposite to say to it. He replied that Vallabhacarya (and all other of four ācāryas) came from South India only; you may say that he didn't want to disturb the culture of North India and thus didn't change this practice, but then he would not have described it as the practice of Goloka Vrindavana as this would render him untruthful. Thus if we are to accept Vallabhacarya as bonafide then it must be accepted that practice of covering head for a women is coming from Goloka and thus there is no question of its being North Indian or South Indian.

He also mentioned that how ladies have a separate cloth called chunni for covering their head and upper body as sarees are worn with panca-kaccha. This cloth has also very deep

significance in Vrindavana lila (he connected it to rasa-lila with philosophical explanation).

59. I was just asked if pregnant women are allowed to worship deities. Of course, most sampradayas and Veda shakhas disallow women to worship deities in any condition, but they are allowed to cook for home deities. HBV allows women if initiated to worship salagrama sila. But what if they are pregnant?

60. Wearing clothes that have been worn by others—any sastric bar on this?

tathā nānya dhṛtaṁ dhāryaṁ (Mahabharat Anu. 104.86; Visnudharmottar 3.233.23)

“Don’t wear clothes worn by others.” – To be checked

na dhārayetparasyaivaṁ snānavāstrāṁ kadācana (Padma Puran Srsti 51.83)

vāstrāṁ nānya dhṛtaṁ dhāryaṁ (Visnudharmottar 2.89.4)

61. Human hair is contaminating especially in food. Wool is the hair of sheep yet it is considered very pure. If a strand of wool got in some food, would that food be considered contaminated?

62. I read somewhere about some rsis who approached a king to learn a certain kind of vidya from him. He seated them above him but when they asked him to teach them that vidya, he told them that he could not. That evening, they discussed among themselves and concluded that he did not teach them because they were sitting above him. Next day they sat below him and made the same request, and this time the king agreed. Please ask on your vidvan conference if anyone can give this anecdote in full.

63. It is said that Saint Tukaram got inspiration of the holy name Hare Krishna by Krishna Chaitanya (Avanga 3875) >>> Ref. VedaBase => BTGPY1f: The Science of Congregational Chanting of the Name of the Lord (Samkirtan) – Pls Check

64. We chant pancaratrika mantras three times daily along with brahma-gayatri. Considering that formerly pancaratriki diksa and upanayanam were clearly distinguished, it seems likely that pancaratrika diksa mantras were/are not chanted three times daily but according to another format. Is that so and if so what is the format? I seem to recall hearing of devotees being told by their guru to chant certain mantras a specific number of times each day, but not at specific times. Among the mantras that Srila Prabhupada gave us are what are called guru-gayatri, gaura-gayatri, and kama-gayatri, which are not the same as brahma-gayatri. By dint of their being known as gayatri mantras, are they to be chanted three times daily? It would seem not, because brahma-gayatri, being an invocation to the devata of the sun, is chanted at the three sandhyas.

65. Both when they meet and when writing a letter, seniors offer blessings to juniors and juniors offer obeisances to seniors. When they meet, friends embrace. When someone writes a letter to a person on the same social platform, what should be his greeting?
66. In traditional agraharams, does each household have a hut for menstruating women or is a facility shared by all in that state?

From Visnucitta Dasa:

My maternal grandfather's house was in the agraharam situated just below the Malakottai (Hill) Ganesh temple and it had a separate hut/structure situated at the back of the house, beyond the garden, for menstruating women. They would stay completely indoors and young children and infants dependent on them would stay with them there and not be allowed into the house. A separate arrangement is made for water (drinking & bathing) and cooked food to be delivered to them, generally kept at a place outside the hut, and later collected by the menstruating woman. The toilets used were same for all members (the hut would be closer to the toilet than the household) but menstruating women would use it at a time when it is known that nobody would be using it or would signal by some means to all members of the household that they needed to use and that the toilet area was out-of-bounds until they finished using it.

If any member (even children) happened to see "out-of-house" women, they would immediately have to take bath with their clothes and any items that they might have been holding (such as utensils etc.) would be either purified with cow dung or discarded.

My maternal grandmother's house in the agraharam in Pudukottai had a hut replete with arrangements for the women staying there complete with kitchen, groceries, drinking water pots, mats, etc.

This was the arrangement in traditional agraharams in the south. Both the houses that I have described have been sold and demolished and all descendants have shifted to Chennai, Bangalore or other cities, as has been the case with most houses in traditional agraharams.

Kesavananda Prabhu:

Since i had been having a talk on this subject with devotees who have lived their childhood in the village life and also have had the opportunity to witness the traditional system while preaching in the interiors of Bihar, Jharkhand, and Nepal, I wanted to add few points to the note by Visnucitta Prabhu. .

1. The rules while menstruation is applicable to all castes.
2. After the menstruation is over, menstruating women have to take full bath, along with hair bath, and especially with some haldi, and cow dung or urine mixed in the water, or alternatively she was sprinkled with cow urine or gobar water. ..
3. After the purifying bath, widows used to sip five drops of urine, while married females used to take five handful of water mixed with kunkum and some drops of urine added to water.
- 4.. The bathing should be within the premise of the house and preferably NOT in the local village pond where everyone usually takes bath.

5. If separate hut cannot be made due to space constraints (especially when the land gets divided between bothers in the successive generations) separate rooms are dedicated at the back of house.

6. Even the shadow of the menstruating female was harmful and thus avoided (I have personally seen flowers and tulasi getting corroded by their shadows)

7. The candidate used to sleep on the floor and not on a cot.

9. The period used to last generally for three to five days, depending on the length of the menstruation (different females gave different length of menstruation).

10. In the last day of the menstruation, the candidate did not use to eat at night with the logic that the impure food will remain in their body the next day of purification. (Some follow this rule, while others do not)

11. If kids were very young they would naturally sometimes go the mother and sometimes play outside in the house. Would this make the entire house contaminated? NO. However, children were made to wear silk or woolen clothes in the summers and winters respectively so that their clothes do not become contaminated while going to and fro between their confined mother and the house. But they were not made to take bath each time. Perhaps, the children were considered to be always purified.

12. And finally, if all the rules appear negative, gloomy and dark, and bad to the bride, the good news is that in these days her only problem, the mother-in-law, would be friendly and supportive to her!

Bharatacandra Prabhu:

In my visit to Karnataka and Andhra villages I have seen the traditional houses have separate inner quarters for women within which a separate room is for Rajasvalas. No photographs to share though. It will be good to photo document these structural arrangements.

67. Most serious hatha-yogis and some other sadhus do not to eat after sunset and some take only milk after sunset.

68. It is said that vivaha is the only samskara for females. But there is also simantonnayana. Is anna-prasana performed for females? And as some girls in traditional culture learn to write and can hear sruti (e.g. Gargi, Maitreyi), can vidyarambha be performed for them?

For Boys, all 16 samskaras are recommended, especially for those born in the families of dvijās (Brahmana, Kṣatriya and Vaiśyas). For Girl child (and for a boy/girl in Śudra family), samskāras till Chudakarma are done (without mantras) while upanayana, samāvartana are not done. Vivaha samskāra is applicable for all with mantras (kumāryā api jātakarmādi samskāraṁ choulāntaḥ sarve amantrakamī kāryaḥ vivāhastu samantraka)

Sl No	Samskara	For a Boy child	For a Girl child
1	Jatakarma	Yes	Yes

2	Namakarana	Yes	Yes
3	Niskramana	Y	Y
4	Karnavedha	Y	Y
5	Annaprasana	Y	Y
6	Choula/Chudakarma	Y	Y
7	Vidyarambha	Y	N
8	Upanayana	Y	N
9	Samavartana	Y	N
10	Vivaha	Y	Y

Regarding Annaprasana:

.ṣaṣtame daṣame dvādaṣe vā māṣe purṇe vatsare vā pumsonnaprāśanam |

pañchama sapṭama navama māṣeṣu strīṇām |

(Dharma Sindhu, Tṛitiya Pariccheda, Annaprasanakalah, Published by Chowkambha Prakashan, Varanasi, 2011)

SB 7.11.28 gives the following point: “dharma-jña” and “dakṣa” - "She must be very expert in handling household affairs and should be fully conversant with religious principles."

In my opinion, therefore, a girl ought to be literate (akṣarabhyasa), educated in samskrit, 64 arts and Purana-Itihasas. Draupadi is said to be have been so scholarly that Pandavas used to also consult her for opinion on religious principles (This apart from the injunction that wife should be consulted by the husband on household activities).

69. Are Tattoos mentioned in sastra?

70. Is Rangoli mentioned in scriptures? I came across a statement that dhuli-citra, making designs of colored powder, is described in Visnu-dharmottara Purana. Do you have any information about that?

Bharatacandra Prabhu:

The information regarding 'Dhuli citra' or Rangavalli (or Rangoli) coming under the 64 arts called 'Tandula kusuma bali vikarika' is scattered. Visnu Dharmottara Purana has a little mention of it in its Chitra-sutra section. Some more information can be obtained from compilations such as 'Manasollasa' and 'Shilparatna'. Apart from these, I am not aware of other sources at present for this art.

71. What does sastra state about using Tulasi as medicine? I suspect that ayurveda approves but that bhakti acaryas disapprove.

72. Cows should be milked only once daily? – sastric reference

73. Here in UK over the Janmastami/VP weekend I noticed that abhisekas are often an hour long or more, which seems particularly inappropriate in this cold climate. What is the norm in traditional sampradayas?

From Bharatacandra Prabhu:

For followers of vaikhanasa agama as well as pancaratra agama, the abhishekam takes no more than 45min to 1 hour. But longer than this is not a standard practice. I spoke to a Srivaisnava who also confirmed to the same.

74. It is a general practice that the dry atta used while making chapatis, the oil that is used for frying is mixed back into the repository of atta/oil to be used for cooking again. Is this practice acceptable? My understanding from what I had learnt from tradition was that since these materials come in contact with food that would be offered, they couldn't be reused. Is this understanding correct?

75. Mention of Toe-rings in Ancient Sanskrit literatures?

76. Divorce's introduction and Nehru's revoking ancient scriptures

77. Mother is first guru – reference

78. I have heard -- "The sikha on the top of the head is to protect the brahma-randhra. Retaining a sikha also helps prevent loss of prana through the brahma-randhra." But I do not know its source and authenticity. I would like to know if anyone has already got some information of or resource to mAhAtmya of keeping zikhA in literatures like purANas etc. and also to description of its benefits. [zikhA means "a tuft or lock of hair on the crown of the head"]

79. It is a tradition for married women to wear bindis on forehead almost all over India. Is there any mention in purANas, or smRtis, etc about this, anyone is aware of?

There is a mention in the Ramayana.vihinatilakeva stree nottara dik prakashate-like the dull face of woman without tilaka or the red mark on the forehead the northern direction does not shine.this is put in the mouth of Srirama. many other references are also available in literary works.Even men put some mark on their foreheads.

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80. Shaving the head is beneficial for health, and bestows long life, physical strength, and purity of mind. But shaving more than once a month the heads of still-growing boys is considered by some as harmful to their health.

81. I have heard that strength and potency on all levels - physical, mental, intellectual, psychic, and spiritual - are preserved by wearing unstitched cloth. I would like to know if anyone has some information about the sources (mainly purANas, veda, etc.; and any research based on these sources) describing importance of wearing unstitched clothes (which is well known in Indian tradition both sankarites and vaisnavas).

82. Should women bath naked? (GM: 25 June 2019)

> >> *BTW except in public areas women should bath naked. Like the gopis did*
> >> *when Krsna stole their clothes.*
> >
> > *Any pramana for this?*
>
>
> *Well I just mentioned one above. The Gopis bathed naked. Then the incident*
> *of Sarmista and Devayani, they were bathing naked.*
>
> *I discussed it with BVPS and he confirmed it. I don't remember the details*
> *of the discussion it was in Dec 2017. The reason was because it was a*
> *topic in my wife's discussion group and at first we thought they also had*
> *to be covered but on further inquiry it was found out not to be the case.*
>
> *But of course because of potential voyuers females wear sari when they> bath at*
> *ghats even if only women. But in their own bathroom not necessary.*

IMHO Saying that "women should bath naked," may not be fully true. It could be said that it was local custom or that women do not commit sin or offense if they bath naked. However, if we use the word "should" then not bathing naked creates offense. We do get some references to the point that it was a local custom for women to take bath naked. We also get pramanas prohibiting women bathing naked if they are performing some vrata. Also in public places if women bath naked they commit offense of showing themselves naked to men who are not their husbands (not for bathing naked).

Thus, it may be concluded that it is mandatory to not bath naked, however, in case of women this mandate is limited to time while they are performing vrata.

[To be updated when more pramanas gathered throwing light on the issue]

Pramanas start

SP Says:

It is an old system among Indian girls and women that when they take bath in the river they place their garments on the bank and dip into the water completely naked. The portion of the river where the girls and women take bath was strictly prohibited to any male, and this is still the system. (Krsna 22)

Acayras explain in commentary to SB 10.22.19:

It is local custom of Gopi-ganas that they take bath naked. However, Krsna uses the word “yuyam” addressing them to be born from great lineages. Thus, they should not take bath naked while executing vrata. If gopis think that they are just following their local custom, then Krsna explains that this has created an offense to Varuna deva and they will not get fruit of their vrata. Then what to do to atone for the offense? Krsna says they should offer Mukhya namaskara -- obeisances with both their hands folded above their head. If they offer obeisances with one hand then that also is offense to deva. Namaskara is mukhya only when it is done with folded hands above the head. (all points are covered in Jiva Gosvami's Brhat-krama-sandarbha)

Visvanatha in Sarartha darsini says that eventhough it is local custom for women to bath naked but while performing bath for vrata they should not do so because that will create offense to devata and will not bring about the result of the vrata. Thus, Krsna uses the word dhṛta-vrata.

Vallabhacarya quotes from Sruti about not bathing naked in water else it creates offense to agnideva: apsu agni-devatAzca tiSThantyataH nApsu mUtra-pUriSaM kuryAt na niSThIvan na vivasanaH snAyAd guhyo vA eSaH agni-retasya agneranatidAhAya

83.

Other queries

1. Vedic definition of species and elements.
2. How is it that Mandodari is described as being chaste, considering that she married Vibhisana after Ravana's death?
3. Why ananda, not sukha, is common in names e.g. Kṛṣṇananda, Hrdayananda?

One answer from Rasananda Prabhu: Sukha is word used for material happiness and it has an opposite word dukkha for it. The word ananda is spiritual and it has no opposite. The sukha is limited and has an end, while ananda is infinite and has property of go on increasing. Thus word ananda is used and not sukha.

4. Siva-Parvati vis-a-vis Radha-Kṛṣṇa.

Could not understand this question. Elaboration needed.

5. If vaidhi leads to Vaikuntha or Dvaraka, why does Rupa include it in BRS and say it leads to raganuga? Is it a different kind of raganuga?
6. The living entity is one ten-thousandth part of the tip of a hair, but the Lord is so inconceivably small that He enters into the heart of this particle. >>> Ref. VedaBase => Bg 8.9
7. There are maybe hundreds of names of Kṛṣṇa/Visnu in relation to lotuses: Kamalanetra, Pankajanghri, etc. Yet among these names that of Padmanabha is particularly well known and often given to children; somewhat less so, Padmalocana. Why is this so?
8. Why is Vedanta sutra so seemingly obscure? Why is Visnu not clearly mentioned?
9. ** Are Śrīla Prabhupāda's commentaries unique in often dealing with subjects not directly discussed in the verse, especially social topics?
[See Answer to point#15 of Others. Combined answer is composed there.](#)
10. GC mentioned that B Mahārāja had said something about the destination after death corresponding to one's faith. Thus Muslims might go to their concept of heaven, Christians to their concept of heaven, etc.
11. Faith, miracles and the power of prayer. Faith and prayer seem to work even if directed toward bogus people. Christian healing rallies. Lourdes. The cross wards off evil spirits.
12. Who are paramatma upasakas? Seems to be little mention in sastra.
13. Tat tvam asi śvetaketu; this is sruti which means unchangeable. So is Śvetaketu eternal?

The actual statement is "svetaketo, atha tvam asi." The smartas and Madhvas answer it thus:

According to Mantra – 'sūryācandramasau dhātā yathā pūrvamakalpayat' (Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda, Taittiriya samhita, Purusa sukta) After the brahmānda was created the Lord created surya, candra and other devatas and day and night and other constituents of time in a fashion similar to His creation in the previous kalpa.

Thus they say that svetaketu is also created each time Universe is created and thus Sruti that is manifested with Universe does not need to change.

14. ** vamsidhari, venudhara. These names are from the vedabase. Why does one end in "a" and the other in "i"? Is it because of gender. Or could there also be vamsidhara, venudhari?

From Jayanityananda Prabhu: It is not due to gender. It is not always that the word ending with “i” is strilinga (feminine gender). “dhari” and “dhara” are just the two different suffixes meaning the same thing and used as per need of meter in compositions. There can also be vamsidhara and venudhari and both are masculine genders.

15. ** Previous acaryas seem to promote trying to attain prema, whereas recent acaryas have emphasized surrender and selfless service from which prema automatically develops. What is the proper understanding of these apparently different approaches?

Adhikara of the hearers seems to be the main explanation that differentiates the approach.

SB 2.7.52 states

*yathā harau bhagavati nṛṇāṁ bhaktir bhaviṣyati
sarvātmany akhilādhāre iti saṅkalpya varṇaya*

Here Lord Brahma instructs Narada-muni to explain and expand Srimad Bhagavatam in a way that people become devotees of the Lord. Here all the ācāryas explain that in this verse Lord Brahma gives guidelines to Narada muni about how to propagate and explain (preach) Srimad Bhagavatam. Vallabhacarya specifically gives an elaborate explanation gist of which is as follows (worth to read full commentary of Vallabhacarya on this verse):

Here Narada-muni is guided to expand, explain and preach Srimad Bhagavatam in a manner that everyone can get pure devotional service of Lord Hari - means that they become completely detached from material relations and become attached to the service of the Lord. This is not possible unless they learn about the glories of the Lord in all matters. Thus lilas concerning aisvarya (opulences) of the Lord also needs to be preached. In short Brahmaji has guided Narada to explain Srimad Bhagavatam seeing the adhikara of the persons and deciding whether to tell in detail Lord's glories or in summary as Lord explained to brahma and brahma to Narada.

This may be used to explain the way Srila Prabhupada has written commentary on Srimad Bhagavatam connecting the current issues of the society with the slokas - to explain in a way that people can become devotees leaving material attachments. Also this can be used to explain why previous acaryas emphasized more on prema while Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura and Srila Prabhupada emphasized more on service - the reason being seeing the adhikara of people to whom they are explaining this science of Godhead to.

Also From Jiva Gosvami's Krama sandarbha on same verse:

"It is best to describe the lilas of Lord related to His svarupa-sakti. But in absence of ruci (taste or the level of ruci that comes before asakti) in hearers for such topics, to purify their consciousness from material attachments, Lord's lilas connected to material nature, His vaibhava (opulences), and His Virat rupa should also be described."

Also Srila Prabhupada mentions in Krsna book Ch.75:

"When Lord Kāñṛṇā, Arjuna and the queens were thus engaged in these jubilant activities, persons who were not clean in heart were agitated by lustful desires. In other words, such behavior between pure males and females is enjoyable, but it makes persons who are materially contaminated become lustful."

So seeing that the people of modern age are trained in being lustful even in situations not very lusty (due to their constantly thinking of lustful activities), their consciousness should not be exposed more to such seemingly lustful pure devotional pastimes (or prema-bhakti activities) lest they will become more attached to material world and not attached to Hari. Thus Srila Prabhupada first concentrated (or attracted) our attention to the main foundation of prema-bhakti activities i.e. surrender and service.

Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura states that "There are two purposes in using word 'Hari' - one is prema i.e. to robe the heart of devotee, and another is to robe the attachment of devotee." Thus the concept of Bhagavata Kathas for relishing Srimad Bhagavatam is directly slashed here by Lord Brahma as the only adhikari to relish Bhagavata katha is a pure devotee (rasika-bhuvi-bhavukah). These Bhagavata-kathas, although directly recited from Bhagavatam and may also be in accordance with ācāryas, because they disregard or neglect the adhikara of the hearers, are not in line with the direct order of our paramparā ācārya Lord Brahma.

Our own Srila Prabhupada is the real person who has propagated or explained the message of Srimad Bhagavatam in accordance to the adhikara of current hearers and thus the result is also as what Brahmaji intended.

Regarding Srila Prabhupada's commentaries being unique – he involves many not directly related social issues, I think that is partly correct (at least seeing the commentaries of ācāryas to 1st and 2nd canto). But one thing to be considered is the broader varnasrama society in place at that time. The commentaries that were written were not written for general populace but for the brahmanas and leaders of the society. And these authorities were responsible to apply the teaching seeing the adhikara of general populace. So it can be thought that the work the local brahmanas and preachers or leaders did in those times, of presenting knowledge in the commentaries of Bhagavatam to general populace according to their adhikara, is done by Srila Prabhupada in his commentaries of Srimad Bhagavatam for kali-yuga populace. So the commentaries of other ācāryas are catering people of high adhikara while these high adhikara people are catering to others.

ⁱ SB 8.7.37.

ⁱⁱ Antya 6.132

ⁱⁱⁱ SB 10.38.38.